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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
Washington 25, D.C.

FIELD MEMORANDUM SCS-#1150

Re: Progressive Farm and
Ranch Conservation
Planning Procedures

September 3, 1952

TO ALL RANKING WASHINGTON AND FIELD OFFICERS:

On April 9, 1951, a memorandum from this office provided for recommending to soil conservation districts improved procedures in farm and ranch conservation planning as an aid to more rapidly expanding the Service's program of assistance to farmers and ranchers in soil conservation districts.

Since that time the proposal has been presented to, and accepted by, the National and State Associations of Soil Conservation Districts, and has been adopted by nearly all soil conservation districts with which the Service is cooperating. This memorandum is intended to reiterate and clarify the meaning and policy with respect to progressive farm planning.

It is the policy of the Service to adhere to the objective of helping prepare a basic conservation plan for every farm and ranch. Through such plans, the coordinated measures and practices that result in high quality soil and water conservation can best be applied to the land. It is the policy of the Service, with the concurrence of districts, to follow the progressive planning procedure.

Progressive planning was developed for use in extending technical assistance to more farmers and ranchers and in getting more conservation on the land. The Service recognizes its responsibility to assist a larger number of farmers and ranchers in soil conservation districts in the proper use and treatment of land.

The improved procedures for progressive farm planning will result in more district cooperators and were developed for two purposes:

- (1) To enable Service technicians to more nearly keep up with the requests for conservation assistance from farmers and ranchers and to develop conservation farmers and ranchers more rapidly. In many soil conservation districts the applications for assistance in planning accumulated faster than the number of basic plans developed annually. In other districts the requests for technical assistance on application of practices by district cooperators and ACP participants does not permit time for immediately developing basic plans for all interested farmers, and
- (2) To help farmers and ranchers who realize they have a conservation problem and are determined to do something about it but who are not yet ready to commit themselves on a complete course of action. Moreover, it is natural for farmers and ranchers to plan and carry out conservation in a series of progressive stages. By adapting planning procedures to this natural way of doing things the Service will be able to assist a great many more farmers and ranchers than

it has been able to reach by previously used methods. In addition, the amount of unproductive planning time will be reduced. By going through the advanced stage of planning farmers and ranchers are further encouraged and are in a position to make their own decisions about their complete system of land use and treatments. A basic conservation plan developed in this way is the farmer's own plan.

Progressive planning provides for helping farmers and ranchers start at whatever stage of conservation they have attained, and progress as rapidly as they can to the point where they are following a basic conservation plan for their entire unit. It consists of (1) the initial stage, (2) the advanced stage, and (3) the development of the basic conservation plan for the entire farm or ranch. The basic conservation plan may be developed progressively or with only one visit by the farm planner. It may be developed through both the initial and advanced stages. The local situation as analyzed with the district governing body, including the work load, the number of active applications for farm plans, the farmer interest, understanding, and needs will be factors to consider along with available land capability maps in deciding whether to develop plans in stages or to develop basic plans.

The farmer-district cooperative agreement form should be comprehensive enough to cover the initial stage, the advanced stage, and the basic conservation plan. Thus, no further agreement would need to be signed when a plan progresses from one stage to another.

The Initial Stage

A farmer or rancher is in the initial stage of planning as soon as he signs a cooperative agreement with his district. However, before any farmer or rancher signs a district agreement he should understand (a) what his soil conservation district is and how it operates, (b) the concept of land use capabilities, and (c) what a basic conservation plan is, how it is prepared, and how he can use it to guide his farming operations. In signing a district cooperative agreement a farmer or rancher agrees to use his land within its capabilities and treat it according to its needs for conservation and improvement, and to develop and carry out a basic conservation plan for all his land. Often the farmer may be ready to apply one or more practices at the time he signs a district agreement, but the fact that he is not immediately ready will not preclude his becoming a cooperator. A cooperator may stay in the initial stage only as long as is required for the Service to supply data and information needed for the advanced stage or to develop his basic farm conservation plan or he may progress through the initial stage over a period of some weeks or months. The rate of progress will depend on his understanding of conservation, his desire to proceed, his resources, the resources of his soil conservation district including the technical assistance of the Service that is available to help him and financial and other assistance available.

Planning in the initial stage is designed to give on-site technical assistance with land use and conservation measures for which the farmer or rancher needs immediate assistance. Technicians giving on-site assistance in the initial stage will encourage the adoption of land use and conservation measures that are within the capabilities of the land and that will ultimately fit into the basic conservation plan when it is developed. The land use capability map may not be available at this stage. In that event the planner should carefully examine the land and determine in his own mind the land use capability classes and units involved.

To the maximum practicable extent activities in this and other stages should be carried out through neighbor and other group action. A progressive record of the practices planned and applied will be maintained. This may be done on a sketch map of the farm or ranch which will ultimately become the planned land use map for the farm. These practices will also be recorded on a form that is placed in the work unit's folder and the farmer's folder, along with the sketch map. As the plan progresses these same records will be maintained currently for all work planned and applied regardless of the stage in which it was done.

The Advanced Stage

In the advanced stage of planning a cooperator needs (1) a land capability map of his farm or ranch unit, plus condition information on his range land and woodland; (2) a conservation farming or ranching guide that is designed for his land; and (3) an understanding of how to use these materials in developing a basic conservation plan. It is a responsibility of the Service to help farmers and ranchers with respect to all three of these needs. Once conservation farming or ranching guides are available, a get-together or two with the technician should put the neighbor groups in position to apply many practices largely on their own. For example, when the members of a neighbor group understand their conservation farming or ranching guides, they could be encouraged to discuss and decide on the practice or practices most important to carry out at once as well as to look forward to completing the basic plans. Providing job sheets will enable them to go ahead with the simpler practices. Selection may also be made of practices they can apply after participating in group demonstrations.

Once in the initial or advanced stage of planning, many farmers will develop their conservation plans progressively and will carry them out by making some of the necessary land use adjustments and applying some additional practices each season. Such a procedure will spread out the time within which the technician can go over the farm with each cooperator and thus facilitate the efficient scheduling of farm visits. Furthermore, farm visits made in this way are likely to be more productive, will require less time per farm, and will probably result in sounder decisions by the farmer. The procedure adopted locally should be flexible enough to permit a farmer to progress as rapidly as he is able.

A district cooperator may participate in the advanced stage of planning as an individual or as a member of a neighbor group. However, this is a perfectly natural activity for group participation and should be the means of greatly stimulating group work.

The Basic Conservation Plan

A farmer or rancher may be considered as having a basic conservation plan when his decisions have been recorded as to how he intends to use all of his land within its capabilities and how he is going to treat it in accordance with its needs in such uses. The make-up of basic conservation plans will vary from place to place and between farms and ranches.

A cooperator who has sufficient understanding and inventory information pertaining to his farm or ranch may develop his basic conservation plan immediately after signing the cooperative agreement with the district. The cooperator will need a land capability map with alternative land use recommendations or range site and condition information as a guide to planning and applying many of the permanent-type practices. As soon as the conservation farming or ranching guides have been made available, cooperators should be encouraged to move ahead with all their conservation work as rapidly as possible. As they make tentative decisions on land use and treatment, most farmers and ranchers will want to confirm these decisions with the Soil Conservation Service planning technicians. In many cases the first time a technician visits a farm or ranch in the advanced stage of planning he can, with very little extra time, encourage the operator to make his decisions as to the use and treatment of the land--all of it.

The use of progressive planning procedures offers many appropriate opportunities to work with neighbor and other groups. In developing conservation farmers and ranchers many activities can be carried on more effectively and with less time by working with groups. Opportunities for increasing the efficiency of our operations are inherent in this procedure. But effective administrative leadership and guidance throughout the Service will be required to take full advantage of the work improvement opportunities.

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